



## PRESS RELEASE

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**For immediate release**

### **Public urged to help avoid “zombie battery” fires as incident rate rises**

Consumers across the UK are today (24/10/2022) being urged to *Recycle Batteries Responsibly* as part of a national campaign to reduce the growing number of serious fires started by carelessly discarded batteries.

When they are thrown away with the general rubbish, or mixed with other recycling, hidden “zombie batteries” can easily become damaged and ignite or explode once collected – particularly higher-powered lithium-ion batteries which are now common across a wide range of household devices from phones and laptops, to power tools, childrens’ toys, ebikes and scooters, and even vape devices.

An [independent report](#) published by Eunomia in 2021 concluded that nearly 50% of all recycling and waste fires in the UK are started by lithium-ion batteries alone and that the total cost of these fires to the country exceeds £150 million each year.

The Eunomia research estimated that just over 200 fires at UK recycling and waste management facilities are caused by batteries each year, but the ESA now considers this likely to be an under-estimate with local authorities and recycling and waste management companies across the UK reporting in 2022 that battery fires are an increasing problem. Informal reporting suggests that the annual number of battery-fires could be three times higher than the Eunomia estimates with hundreds more fires occurring in recycling and waste management facilities and collection vehicles.

In response to this growing problem, the Environmental Services Association (ESA), along with its members and compliance scheme [Ecosurety](#), have re-launched the national [Take Charge](#) campaign today with the aim of reversing the growing trend of battery fires, by encouraging consumers to *recycle batteries responsibly*.

The campaign provides a wide range of visual content and encourages all stakeholders in the recycling and waste industry to share the campaign content across their social media channels. The Halloween-themed campaign officially launches on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and will run until 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022. After this date, a range of non-Halloween campaign content will be made available for use in perpetuity – including items like signage for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs), bin-hangers and posters.

The campaign messaging urges consumers to only recycle batteries, and electronic devices containing batteries, using specialist recycling services, and reminds the

public to never throw batteries away alongside general rubbish or other recycling by drawing attention to the fire risk.

Dead batteries thrown away with other waste and recycling are likely to be crushed or punctured once the waste is collected and processed. Some battery types can ignite or even explode when this happens, which sets fire to other materials present in the waste, like paper, leading to serious incidents that can put lives at risk and take days to extinguish.

Although safe to use normally, lithium-ion batteries are most prone to causing fires or explosions if they are damaged because they haven't been recycled properly. These batteries are most common in products like laptops, tablets, mobile phones, radio-controlled toys, Bluetooth devices, shavers, electric toothbrushes, power tools, scooters and even e-cigarettes (the latter of which is a rapidly growing waste stream).

**Executive Director of the Environmental Services Association (ESA), Jacob Hayler said:** *"Since we first launched Take Charge in 2020, the number of battery-fires at recycling and waste facilities unfortunately seems to have risen considerably and is affecting all operators in the sector - not helped by the tinder-dry conditions caused by the heatwave this summer. These fires not only put lives at risk, but also seriously threaten vital infrastructure upon which all of us across the UK rely on every day. We urge everyone to please recycle batteries and electronic devices responsibly and help us stop waste batteries from becoming zombies."*

**Mark Andrews, National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) Waste Fire Lead said:** *"We encourage people to Take Charge and correctly recycle batteries and electronic devices in specialist recycling services. This could significantly reduce the increasing number of challenging fires that fire and rescue services have to deal with. These can often be large-scale incidents which disrupt local communities and pose a risk to life, but they can be prevented."*

**Sam Horne, Chair of the National Association of Waste Disposal Officers (NAWDO), which represents local councils, said:** *"We know that residents are keen to recycle and sometimes this results in the wrong things ending up in the wrong place. Unfortunately, where this includes batteries being placed in the residual or recycling streams it can have serious implications. It puts the lives of staff working in facilities at risk as well as the facilities themselves, which has major implications for services and ultimately impacts residents through delayed and missed collections as the whole system can be impacted. We support this essential campaign that encourages residents to dispose of batteries via appropriate routes."*

**Stephanie Housty, Marketing & Sustainability Manager at Ecosurety said:** *"Most citizens want to do their bit and recycle, but often need guidance to do it properly, especially for batteries and small WEEE with embedded batteries. Following on our long-standing commitment to increase recycling, it was important for Ecosurety to get behind this campaign and drive up the public awareness of the growing Lithium batteries fires issue to nudge consumers to dispose of batteries and small electrical devices safely."*

Consumers can find out where to recycle batteries responsibly in their area, and more about the dangers of *Zombie Batteries*, by visiting the campaign website at [www.takecharge.org.uk](http://www.takecharge.org.uk)

## ENDS

### Notes to editors

For media enquiries, please contact Ben Johnson at [b-johnson@esauk.org](mailto:b-johnson@esauk.org) or by phone on **07966 304330**. We would be happy to make a spokesperson available for interviews and will endeavour to facilitate any filming requests at ESA members' facilities across the UK as required.

Images and videos appended to this release are for editorial use only please. They include:

- A new short film of battery fire incidents, which can be embedded in online coverage as your platforms allow. The link to the film is below. We can supply the video file if necessary but this may necessitate third-party license clearing for the music track.

<https://youtu.be/gnVIBXNw7Fc>

- Photographic images of batteries – licenses are fully owned by ESA and extended to cover all editorial use free of copyright claim.
- All of the campaign graphics and content can be [downloaded here](#) by completing the form.

If sharing news items on social media, please tag:

**@ESA\_Takecharge** on Twitter

**@esa\_takecharge** on Instagram

**@ESATakeCharge** on Facebook

You may also wish to use #takecharge if uploading to social media. This ensures that we can interact with, and promote, your content.

All photos and videos should be credited to ESA 2022 © please.

### About the campaign

The *Take Charge* Campaign was first established in October 2020 and is managed by the Environmental Services Association (ESA). The 2022 campaign has been supported with kind sponsorship from [Ecosurety](#).



A full set of campaign assets is available to download at [www.takecharge.org.uk/downloads](http://www.takecharge.org.uk/downloads) - please read the accompanying Supporter Guide before sharing or publishing this content.

### **About battery recycling**

- All batteries (except car batteries) should be recycled using battery recycling collection points. These are often found in supermarkets, DIY stores, high-street shops and local household waste recycling centres (HWRCs).
- Around 40% of local councils also offer a kerbside collection for used batteries, but these should always be recycled separately to other materials. Residents should follow local instructions.
- Similarly, batteries should always be removed from waste electricals where possible before they are discarded and waste electrical items should be recycled at a local HWRC or via a kerbside collection if possible. If batteries cannot be removed safely, they should be left in waste electrical devices, and these should be recycled using a waste electricals recycling service.
- All batteries can be recycled, but the current recycling rate for batteries is around 45% of all batteries placed on the market – meaning that 55% are not currently recycled properly.